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SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 9, 1885.

COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

IF A REPUTATION for truthfulness, where the truth can be learned, and for plausibility, where things have to be guessed at, is of any value to a newspaper, the attention of our journalists should be called to their Washington news. We recently alluded to a supposed report to the first auditor, made by a committee which had been investigating the geological survey, and filled with a very detailed account of illegal proceedings in the work of that bureau. A pretended abstract of this report was telegraphed to the *New York Times*, of Wednesday, Sept. 16, to the *Boston Advertiser*, and perhaps to many other journals. We showed the report to be a clumsy fabrication on internal evidence. It now turns out that not only the report, but the committee itself, was purely imaginary. No such committee ever existed, and, of course, no such report was ever made by any responsible authority. The latest news is that, so far as Auditor Chenoweth has examined the accounts of the geological survey, he has found no illegality in its expenditures.

Coupled with the statements are certain alleged utterances of the auditor of such a character, that a suit for libel on his part ought to lie against the newspapers which have put them into his mouth. For example, that 'these gentlemen,' the scientific employes of the survey, would be required by him to do only such things as common people could understand. Apart from the calibre of mind which would be displayed by such a remark, the very act of attributing it to the auditor shows an ignorance of the duties of that functionary, which ought not to be tolerated in a Washington correspondent, unless, indeed, knowledge is regarded in his case as a disqualification by reason of its acting as a drag upon the flights of his imagination. At the risk of diffusing unwelcome knowledge, we will point out that the functions of an auditor are only those implied in his title. It is his duty to see that all government expenditures, which he is charged with auditing, are made in accordance

with the laws governing them. If he finds that an officer is spending money for any other purpose than that stated in the law which appropriates it, that he is paying extra salaries to employes, that he is employing more or other men than the law allows, or is in any other way deviating from legal requirements in his expenditures, he must stop him. But it does not concern the auditor whether an employé does, or does not, receive pay from an institution of learning, for the simple reason that there is no law against the officers of such institutions being employed in the government service. Nor can he inquire how an officer is employed, or whether his services are worth the salary paid him. All such questions as these belong to the head of the department to which the officer belongs, and it is for the Secretary of the interior alone to decide whether college professors shall be employed in the geological survey, and whether they shall do anything which common people cannot understand. The newspapers have, therefore, represented the auditor as usurping the functions of the Secretary of the interior.

Indefinite hints have now and then been given out that there was something wrong with Professor Baird's fish commission. Nothing has officially transpired except a brief correspondence with the auditor about the legality of erecting a 'residence building' at Wood's Holl. Professor Baird explains that this building was not erected, as the auditor seemed to infer, merely as a residence for the officers of the commission, but for the general work of the commission, and was called by the objectionable name because it contained the quarters necessary for the officers during the performance of their duties. One feature of this case has been entirely overlooked. Professor Baird's duties as fish commissioner are entirely gratuitous, as he receives no salary whatever from the government proper. The salary of the secretary of the Smithsonian institution is paid from the income of the Smithsonian fund, of which the government is the trustee, not the owner. We believe it contrary to sound principles that the government should ask or expect this class of services to be gratuitous. So long as

they are, the public will look with great lenity on the donor providing himself and his co-laborers with the necessary shelter, while they are engaged upon their professional duties.

AT A MEETING of the Brookville society of natural history, Sept. 22, a committee was appointed to confer with the scientific associations, educational institutions, and with individuals throughout the state of Indiana, concerning the advisability of the formation of a state academy of science, and if thought advisable, to coöperate with such persons in favor of the formation of such an association. Free expression of opinion is called for by the committee, both as to the need of such an organization and as to the best plan for its composition. It is now the plan to hold a meeting at Indianapolis between Christmas and New Year's day. It proposed that the organization shall enable the citizens of Indiana who are engaged in scientific work to meet at certain times "for social intercourse, for the exchange of ideas, and the comparison of results of scientific studies." It would appear from the prospectus that the academy would be a state society similar to the American association.

WE ARE INFORMED by Prof. Chas. A. Bacon, director of the Beloit college observatory, that the statement made in *Science* for Sept. 4, that the observatory had been closed on account of lack of funds, is incorrect. Professor Bacon states that, on the contrary, new arrangements have been made for carrying on additional observations in meteorology, and that especial attention will be paid to solar and spectroscopic work with greater facilities than before.

IN THE *American meteorological journal* for September, Dr. Daniel Draper, director of the Central park meteorological observatory, asks the questions, What is ozone? and Can ozone produce pneumonia? and he gives, for the months of January, February, March, April and May for each year from 1878 to 1885, the death rate from pneumonia for New York City, and the figures expressing the amount of ozone and the number of days on which it was present in the atmosphere, as shown by the continuous records of his observatory. The coincidence of the curves indi-

cated by the sets of figures—though possibly only accidental—yet seems sufficient to warrant further investigation of the matter, and would seem to call upon chemists to join now with physicists—who are making a special study of atmospheric electricity—to see if they can further clear up the doubtful relations between oxygen, ozone and electricity, and, perhaps, discover a simpler and more reliable method than the present, by which ozone tests or observations can be regularly made by meteorological observers.

THE PRESIDENT AND PROFESSOR AGASSIZ.

When it became known a few days ago that the President had invited Professor Agassiz to assume the direction of the coast survey, there was great satisfaction among those who desire that the principles of good government should be applied to the scientific bureaus as well as to the other executive offices. The independent position of Professor Agassiz, his administrative ability, and his acquaintance with the state of science in this country are so obvious, that even those who believe as we do, that a person trained in mathematical and physical science should be the head of the survey, must have seen that in the emergency Agassiz was a very felicitous choice. The announcement that he had been selected by the President for this responsible station was an assurance that the administration desired a man of unsullied name and of unquestioned ability to guide the affairs of the coast survey in the embarrassments which they have encountered. It removed the apprehensions which have been entertained that scientific work will not be encouraged by the party in power. It showed that the President and the Secretary of the treasury, in the difficulty which has arisen, are not indifferent to the survey, but are sincerely desirous of placing it under the direction of an able man, whose name and character would be the guarantee of success.

The health of Professor Agassiz precludes his acceptance, but he has another reason for refusing the office in question. In his opinion, the guidance of the coast survey requires an expert. The problems to be decided, the methods to be employed, the men to be engaged, should be determined by one who knows the business. Any other person would be in danger of failure. The culture of Agassiz is so broad and his experience has been